



## USE OF TANF ACTIVITIES AND OPINIONS ABOUT WORKFIRST

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This report describes preliminary results of the second wave of the WorkFirst Study (WFS). The study sample was drawn from the statewide list of adults receiving welfare assistance in March 1999. Survey respondents were interviewed between December 1999 and August 2000 and again in February-May 2001. This report uses data from 3,037 interviews in the first year and the first 1,462 re-interviews.

This report describes survey data on the use of TANF activities and opinions about the WorkFirst program. The questions address use and perceived helpfulness of TANF activities, perceptions of how the respondents' lives had changed in the past year, and general impressions of the WorkFirst program. Responses are compared between the 2000 and 2001 surveys.

### FINDINGS

- **Two-thirds of WorkFirst Study respondents believed that their lives had improved over the past year (65%); only 13 percent felt their lives had gotten worse.**
- **Most respondents had a positive impression of WorkFirst (72%). Most believed WorkFirst was helpful in promoting self-**

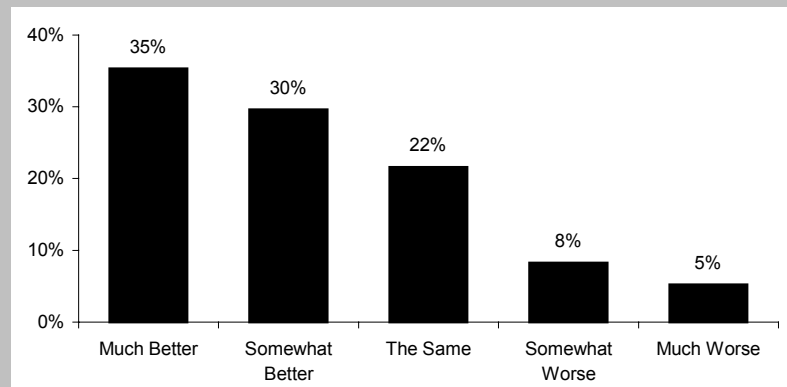
**sufficiency (68%), and most believed they were unlikely to receive WorkFirst benefits in a year (78%).**

- **Compared to 2000, more respondents thought WorkFirst was helpful in promoting self-sufficiency and that they were unlikely to receive WorkFirst benefits in a year.**
- Respondents were asked about the effectiveness of caseworkers, job search, individual responsibility plans, and job coaches. **All five WorkFirst activities were believed to be helpful or very helpful in promoting self-sufficiency by a majority of users.**
- **About a third of respondents mentioned other WorkFirst programs that were helpful towards self-sufficiency, including support services (14%) and WorkFirst classes and workshops (5%).** Clothing assistance, car repair and gas vouchers, and childcare/family assistance were most frequently mentioned as important support services.
- **Nearly all respondents (92%) gave suggestions to improve WorkFirst.** Improving staff, increasing staff time with clients and emphasizing education and training over immediate job placement were the most common recommendations (28%).

## Quality of Life

Almost two-thirds of all respondents reported an increase in their quality of life from a year earlier; 22% reported no change. Thirteen percent reported a decrease in their quality of life.

**FIGURE 1: PERCEPTIONS OF CHANGES IN QUALITY OF LIFE: 2000-2001**

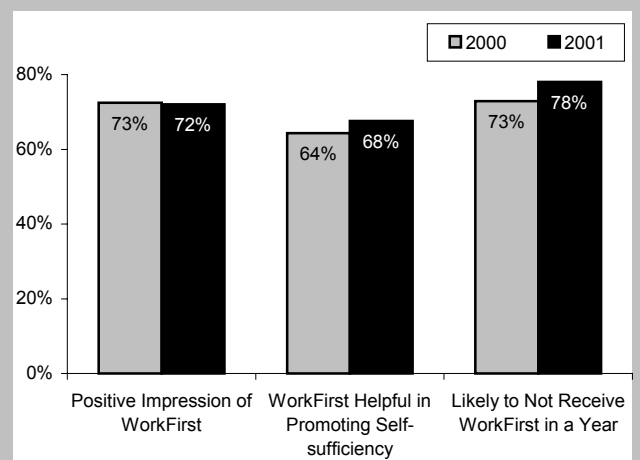


## General Impressions of WorkFirst

Most respondents (72%) reported a positive impression of WorkFirst, with 27% reporting a very positive experience. Eleven percent reported a very negative impression of WorkFirst. This is about the same as in 2000, although the percent reporting a very positive experience decreased slightly (4%).

Compared to last year, more reported that WorkFirst was helpful in promoting self-sufficiency (from 64% to 68%). Seventy-eight percent predicted that they are unlikely to receive WorkFirst benefits in a year, compared to 73% last year. Sixty-two percent of respondents reported that they are very unlikely to receive WorkFirst benefits a year from the survey, up from 54% who held this belief a year earlier.

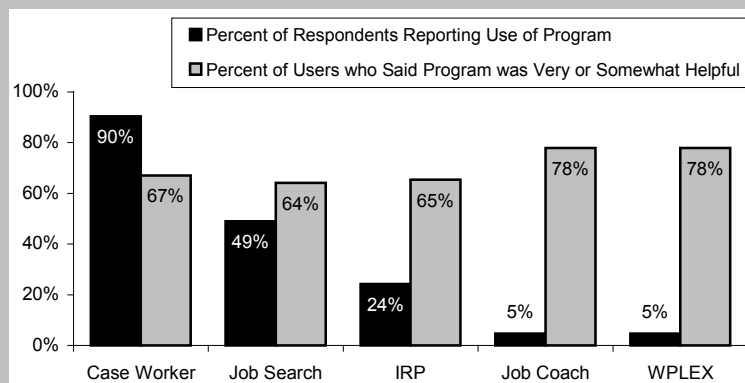
**FIGURE 2: OVERALL IMPRESSIONS OF WORKFIRST**



## Use and Helpfulness of Programs

About two-thirds of users found caseworkers, job search, and Individual Responsibility Plans (IRPs) to be very or somewhat helpful in helping them towards self-sufficiency. More than three-quarters of users found Job Success Coach and Washington Post-Employment Labor Exchange (WPLEX) to be helpful.

**FIGURE 3: USE AND PERCEIVED HELPFULNESS OF WORKFIRST PROGRAMS**



Respondents were also asked if any other programs were helpful to them in promoting self-sufficiency. Almost a third (29%) of the 1,462 survey respondents answered this question.

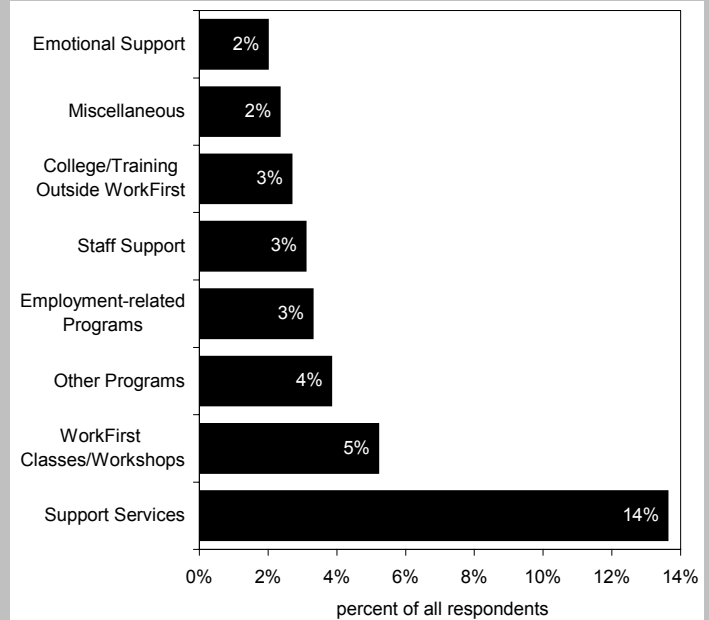
Fourteen percent of all respondents found support services to be helpful, and 5% named WorkFirst classes and workshops as helpful in promoting self-sufficiency.

Three percent of respondents reported that the employment related programs, the support of WorkFirst staff, and training outside WorkFirst were helpful. Most respondents who mentioned outside training referred to college courses or vocational/technical schools, with a few reporting use of computer training programs and receiving their GED. Two percent reported other aspects of WorkFirst, and 2% also mentioned the emotional support gained through WorkFirst.

*Employment-related Programs:* Of the 3% of respondents who mentioned employment-related programs, more than a quarter used the Community Jobs Program. Almost a third also mentioned other job search programs. Another fifth mentioned the Work Experience (WEX) program. Nine percent used other community services, and a few respondents reported the Washington Post-Employment Labor Exchange (WPLEX).

*WorkFirst Training:* Of the 5% of survey respondents who reported that WorkFirst classes and workshops were helpful, over a third named general WorkFirst courses (37%) and 17% reported that the weeklong job search workshop was helpful to achieving self-sufficiency. Another third mentioned assistance with writing and editing resumes, and about a tenth mentioned interview preparation. Four percent said that the speakers at WorkFirst courses were helpful.

**FIGURE 4: ASPECTS OF  
WORKFIRST REPORTED HELPFUL**

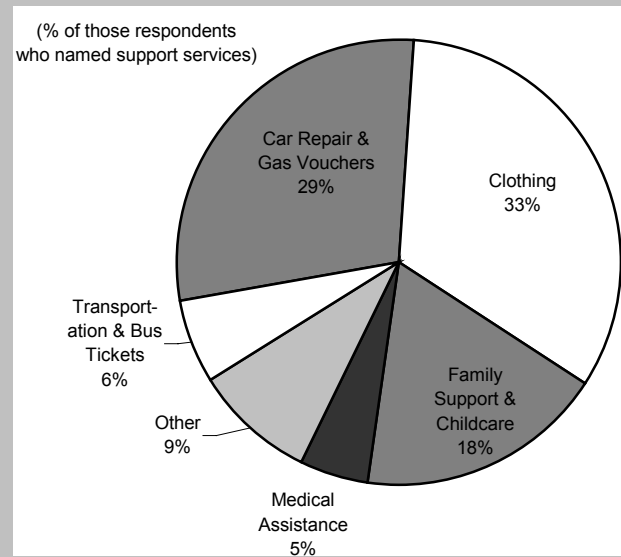


### Support Services

Of the fourteen percent of respondents who mentioned support services, a third (33%) reported clothing assistance to be helpful to their self-sufficiency. Almost a third (29%) found car repairs and gas vouchers to be helpful.

Another 18% mentioned the family support services (including child support and family planning assistance) and childcare assistance programs. Five percent found medical assistance helpful, and 6% reported bus tickets or transportation. Nine percent mentioned other support services.

**FIGURE 5: SUPPORT SERVICES  
REPORTED HELPFUL**



## **Suggested Improvements to WorkFirst**

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Survey respondents were asked how TANF programs, including WorkFirst, could be improved. Nearly all respondents gave an answer to this question (92%).

Sixteen percent of the respondents to this question mentioned improving the staff and having more time with the staff, especially one-on-one time. They asked for a reduction in caseworker caseloads, for more timely responses to phone calls to caseworkers, and more staff concern for clients and understanding of clients' difficult circumstances.

Twelve percent of the respondents said WorkFirst should emphasize training and education. These respondents asked for more on-the-job training, more classes at WorkFirst, and a reduction in the work requirements while attending school.

Ten percent of respondents said that they didn't know how to improve the programs. Another 10% said that there was no improvement needed; the program was doing a good job.

Nine percent of respondents focused on children and parents' needs, especially childcare. They asked for more help with childcare and more time for mothers after the birth of a child before returning to work. Assistance with child support collection was also mentioned.

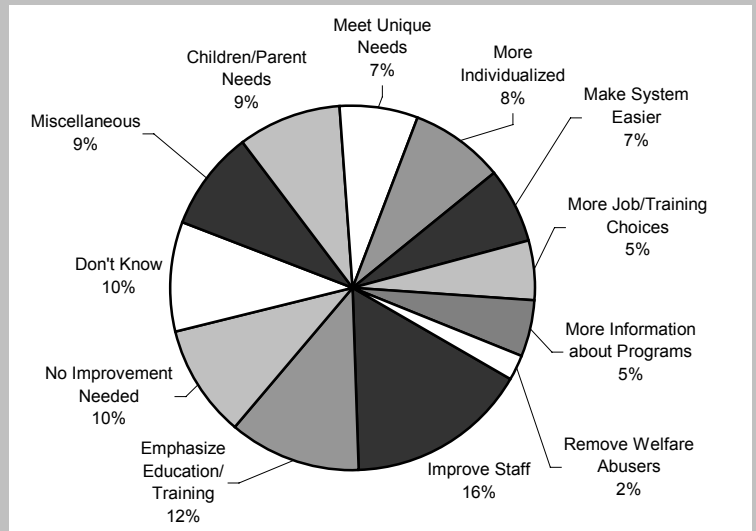
Another nine percent mentioned a broad range of miscellaneous improvements, from transportation to location and hours of WorkFirst offices. Some wanted the five-year limit to be raised or eliminated, and less pressure from workers to get jobs right away. Respondents also said that they spent too much time in WorkFirst meetings and classes.

Eight percent said the system should be more individualized, with case-by-case decisions that would reflect each individual's circumstances.

Seven percent mentioned unique needs, such as clients with medical conditions, disabilities, drug and alcohol addiction, and those caring for ill children or other family members. They also noted unique needs of rural residents: long distances to work and difficulty finding jobs in economically depressed areas.

Seven percent said the system should be easier, with increased eligibility and less paperwork. Five percent wanted more job and training choices. They suggested finding more employers who would hire and train welfare recipients, and allowing recipients to train for a wider range of jobs.

**FIGURE 6: SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS TO WORKFIRST**



Another 5% wanted more information about available programs. Many of these did not know about programs such as medical assistance, car repair, or childcare reimbursement, and felt that caseworkers should make these programs known to clients. Two percent of the respondents reported that the system should be stricter so that those who abuse the system can be found.